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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [GH](#)  
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY OUTLINES CASE FOR CHANGE IN  
LEADERSHIP

REF: ACCRA 1822

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Gary Pergl for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In an August 29 meeting with PolChief, the General  
Secretary of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Ghana's

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main opposition party, complained that the Electoral  
Commission (EC) failed to conduct its annual update of voter  
registration lists in 2007, which the NDC contends will  
reinforce past undercounts in NDC strongholds. NDC leaders  
said that the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) is abusing its  
incumbent status for electoral advantage, particularly  
through control of the media. The NDC is particularly  
critical of EC efforts to implement voting for overseas  
Ghanaians, stating that the EC has failed to adequately  
prepare for such voting and that this will be used by the NPP  
to rig the election. Similar concerns were raised by other  
opposition parties at an August 24 lunch with CODEL Payne.  
The NDC warned that the opposition will not accept overseas  
voting for the 2008 election, and suggested that the NDC may  
not accept a negative result if it perceives irregularities  
in the 2008 election. END SUMMARY.

Registration Delays

12. (C) Polchief and PolFSN met August 29 with Asiedu Nketia  
Johnson, NDC General Secretary, and Kofi Attor, NDC Director  
of International Relations. Johnson began by expressing  
concern over Electoral Commission preparations for the 2008  
presidential and parliamentary elections. Johnson complained  
that the government had "starved" the EC of funding, while  
focusing on implementation of ROPAL - the "Representation of  
the People's Amendment Law." (NOTE: ROPAL extends the vote  
to Ghanaians living abroad, and was passed by Parliament in  
2006 despite strong opposition from minority parties. END  
NOTE). The result, complained Johnson, is that preparations  
for the internal phase of Ghana's election are being  
hampered. The NDC said that the EC's current priority should  
be to update voter registration lists before December.  
(NOTE: One factor delaying the registration process is that  
the EC can no longer procure the Polaroid film it has used in  
the past to make election ID cards. The new system may not  
be available until 2008. END NOTE).

13. (C) Johnson said the NDC is particularly concerned about  
updating voter registration lists, because of registration  
difficulties for the 2004 elections that resulted in the  
undercounting of voters in three NDC strongholds. If, said  
Johnson, the registration process is delayed by one or two  
months, the EC will not be able to complete the registration

process on time. In addition, said Johnson, difficulties in registering voters could reinforce the undercounted registrants from 2004 - including what the NDC claims was a 90,000 voter undercount in the Volta region and approximately 400,000 voter undercount in the whole of Ghana. Johnson pointed out that this was close to the margin of Kufuor's victory.

#### Overseas Voting

14. (C) The NDC officials noted several problems with regard to ROPAL, and said they fear the NPP will use the overseas vote to rig the election in its favor. The NDC said the logistical challenge is monumental given the large number of Ghanaians living abroad. This is particularly difficult because many of those Ghanaians are illegal residents of their host countries, and Ghanaian identity documents (such as passports) are easy to procure fraudulently. The EC, they said, has not adequately planned how to conduct voter registration and voting overseas, nor has it specified how this initiative would be funded.

15. (C) In terms of funding, Johnson noted that Ghana required foreign assistance to fund its previous presidential/parliamentary elections (NOTE: In the 2004 election approximately 42% of the EC budget came from foreign donors. END NOTE). How, asked Johnson, can the EC contemplate funding overseas voting when the country has been unable so far to self-fund the domestic portion of the election?

16. (C) Johnson also said the NDC will not accept a scenario in which Ghanaian embassies oversee voting and registration. In a large country like the United States, it will be difficult for Ghanaians living far from the Embassy to vote, particularly poorer Ghanaians. Johnson also said that Ghanaian ambassadors are subject to political pressure from the ruling government and could therefore not be trusted as impartial overseers.

#### ... and Memory of 2004 Dispute

17. (C) Johnson recalled that in the 2004 elections there were 3,000 polling stations (out of 21,000) in which disputed results were challenged in court. In these constituencies - all NPP strongholds - the voting tallies revealed 100% voter turnout. The margin of votes that prevented a run-off election for President Kufuor was 138,000 votes. The NDC challenged the results for these districts, claiming that it was not possible to have 100% turnout without fraud (i.e. some registered voters would have died between the time of registering and voting), but this challenge was never resolved.

18. (C) Johnson said that while the NDC wanted to contest the results of the 2004 election, some observers - including the U.S. government - appealed to Atta-Mills to accept the results "for the sake of peace in Ghana and West Africa." This time around, stressed Johnson, there will be little tolerance for abuses. The NDC is particularly concerned that the government will use ROPAL to rig the election, and for that reason, said Johnson, the NDC "will not accept ROPAL." (NOTE: Johnson's comments on ROPAL were echoed by smaller opposition parties during an August 24 lunch with CODEL Payne. END NOTE).

#### NPP Using Power of Incumbency for Partisan Advantage

19. (C) Johnson and Attor also complained that the NPP is unfairly using incumbency to support its re-election. They noted that former NPP Foreign Minister Akuffo-Addo would announce his candidacy later that day (August 29) via the state-owned media, whereas NDC candidate John Atta-Mills had been blocked from purchasing media time for his announcement prior to the 2004 elections. Johnson said that while the NDC

challenged this in court, the NPP had packed the courts by adding pro-NPP Supreme Court justices. Johnson also said that the majority of the privately owned media is pro-NPP and said he believes the NPP will use its control of the media to support an NPP candidate in the 2008 election.

#### Timeline/Financing

¶10. (SBU) In terms of a timeline, the NDC is currently selecting parliamentary candidates in "orphan" constituencies (parliamentary seats currently held by other parties). The NDC has spread out the dates for these primaries, but this process will be completed by December. In addition, the NDC is fund-raising through dinners at branch, regional, national and overseas party outposts. This effort includes Atta-Mills' well-publicized travel in the U.S. to meet with Ghanaian Diaspora communities (reftel).

¶11. (C) With regard to fund raising, Johnson and Attor said that the Government's actions have made this very difficult for opposition parties. The NPP, they said, has "targeted" donors who have contributed to the opposition. Since many businesses depend heavily on government contracts or business, the NPP's refusal to do business with NDC contributors has had a chilling effect on opposition finances.

¶12. (SBU) The NDC officials said they support public financing of political campaigns, and that a Ghanaian NGO is preparing a draft bill to provide public financing. However, due to the requirements of Ghana's legislative process, no bill with financial aspects can be introduced by individual members of Parliament (i.e. only the Government may introduce legislation with even minor financial requirements). While the NPP supported public financing while in opposition, noted Attor, it has not supported public financing legislation while in power. (NOTE: The NDC also did not support public financing while it was in power prior to Kufuor's victory in ¶2000. END NOTE).

¶13. (SBU) Johnson also said that the NDC is conducting training sessions for party polling agents, who will represent the party during the 2008 voting at each of the 21,000 polling stations in Ghana. He noted that this is an expensive undertaking, as two NDC representatives will be present at each polling station.

#### Key Election Issues: Governance and Corruption

¶14. (SBU) Johnson said that NPP corruption would be one of the principal issues in the campaign, and cited the NPP's failure to appoint an Auditor General - a key anti-corruption post - in accordance with Ghanaian law. He said that political power has produced in the NPP a feeling of "omnipotence" and that NPP behavior in office has led to an impression among Ghanaians that corruption is acceptable. Johnson cited a comment by President Kufuor that "corruption started with Adam" in excusing the actions of an accused minister. Attor said there were many examples in which the President has defended corrupt members of his government. This has had a debilitating effect on anti-corruption institutions.

¶15. (SBU) In addition to corruption, Attor and Johnson said that key issues for the NDC in the 2008 campaign would be the ongoing energy crisis in Ghana, narcotics scandals and the growing problem with trafficking, the standard of living, and unemployment.

#### Comment

¶16. (C) The NDC's comments are indicative of the intense passion surrounding the upcoming elections, even at this early stage, and a feeling that some outside observers have

glossed over serious corruption problems in singing the praises of Ghana's democracy. The NDC feels that the ruling NPP has abused its majority status and is inappropriately planning to use incumbency to gain a third consecutive term in office. In addition, the NDC's concerns over ROPAL are serious, particularly for a country that has relied on donor support for domestic elections. The EC's plans to implement overseas voting do not appear well developed, and have unified the opposition against ROPAL. There appears to be a real possibility that a hastily implemented program could open the door to a major dispute in 2008. This is particularly problematic given that the 2008 election is expected to be close. END COMMENT.  
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